

A day of student service

DMS student participates in governor's Project 351

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Even a snowstorm couldn't keep this student from giving back.

Duxbury Middle School student Chris Leaverton was selected to participate in Project 351, a day of community service where at least one eighth grader from every city and town in Massachusetts participated — (thus, Project 351.)

The day was originally supposed to be timed with

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Roslindale eighth grader Shannon Keith helped Governor Patrick and sports figures announce Project 351.

Photo from Project351.com

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Student gives back with Gov

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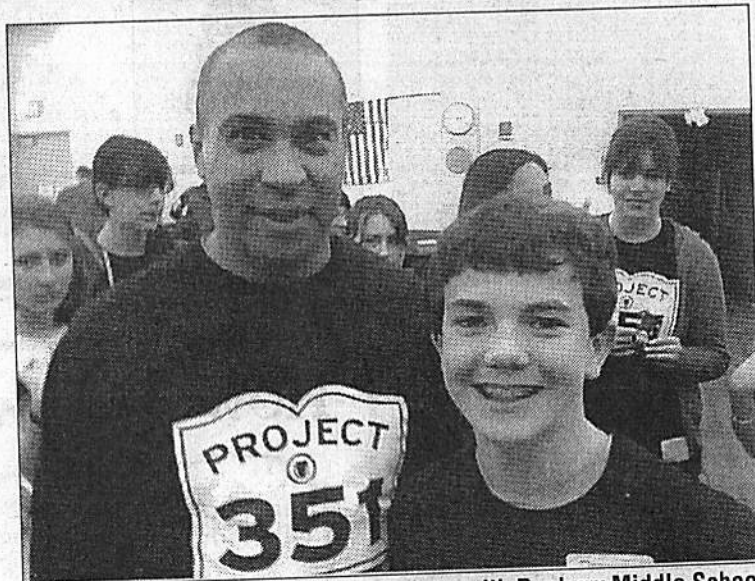
Governor Deval Patrick's inauguration on Jan. 15, but the day was pushed back a week because of the snowstorm.

Leaverton was one of two students nominated for the opportunity to participate.

"[DMS Principal Blake] Dalton called me and another girl down because we're both members of school council ... and he thought we were both eligible for this," Leaverton said. However, only one student could go, and Dalton settled the matter with an age-old solution.

"We flipped a coin," Leaverton said.

The student was grateful for the opportunity. He said that it was his first experience with hands-on community service.



Governor Deval Patrick poses for a photo with Duxbury Middle School student Christopher Leaverton during Project 351, a day of community service that involved at least one child from every city and town in Massachusetts.

"[Dalton] said the governor wanted to do something for his inauguration. He gave me a couple of papers about it, and I knew it was about community service," Leaverton said.

However, the young man is no stranger to being involved in his community. In addition to serving on student council for three years, he is also a student representative to the DMS School Council, which consists of students, teachers and faculty. He is also a WEB Leader — a mentoring program which matches up eighth grade students with incoming sixth grade students to help ease the transition into middle school. He was selected to be one of two student representatives on the vice principal selection committee.

"It makes me feel good that I'm improving something everyone around me is using," he said of his work on the various school groups. "It's something that's close to home."

When the day of service finally arrived, Leaverton took a bus with other students from the South Shore to Cradles to Crayon's "new giving factory" in Brighton. There, the students participated in a town

hall-style meeting with the governor and Lt. Governor Tim Murray.

"People asked him things like why did you want to go into politics, what's the hardest part of your job," Leaverton said. The governor said dealing with budget limitations and getting used to having a security detail were some of the difficult things he dealt with upon becoming governor.

Leaverton said Patrick was "a nice guy."

"There were a lot of people, but I got to shake his hand," he said.

After the meet-and-greet, students were bused to a number of project sites around Greater Boston. Leaverton's site was the William Blackstone Elementary School in South Boston. Blackstone is one of 14 "turnaround schools" that scored low on the MCAS standardized test, the students were told.

At the school, the volunteers met the vice principal and painted murals.

"She was really glad we were doing this. She was talking about how they were trying to create unity," Leaverton said.

He and about 15 other students worked on painting

frames that the students could use to display their work. He said some of the painting focused on the school's motto, respect, unity, excellence.

They also incorporated the word "Ubuntu," a word that roughly translates as "I am because we are" and was used by the Boston Celtics as a rallying cry during their championship season.

After the day of service was complete, the students went back to Cradles to Crayons to share what they learned.

"Optimism and effort are the keys to our Commonwealth's success, and we will bring that spirit to the inauguration and our second term," said Governor Patrick in a press release before the event. "Our inaugural events will challenge and motivate residents to come together, and renew our sense of community."

Leaverton said he had a great experience participating in Project 351.

"I met a lot of different people from a lot of different places, but we were really there for the same reasons, that we wanted to help people," he said. "I learned it doesn't take much to do community service. It can be really fun."